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SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU: INFORMATION ON OHCHR FIELD PRESENCE

REF: STATE 73151

Classified By: Ambassador Janice L. Jacobs for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) This cable responds to reftel requirement to provide an assessment of the effectiveness the Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights activities in Guinea-Bissau. Overall, the office appears competent and well-run, but should put more emphasis on what it identifies as the main human rights problem, lack of basic services. End Summary.

THREE-PRONGED STRATEGY

¶2. (U) The Human Rights Unit (HRU) within UNOGBIS has three strategies. First is education about human rights via institutions including the law faculty, national Human Rights League, and other NGOs. The HRU helps write curricula to deliver appropriate themes and messages. The second strategy is technical cooperation and capacity building of the Ministry of Justice to defend human rights, and helping to set up a National human rights institute. The final strategy is monitoring, investigating, and reporting allegations of abuse. For example, the HRU visits detention centers to report on deplorable conditions prisoners are subjected to.

¶3. (C) The HRU said it believed that, while human rights are not the biggest problem in Guinea-Bissau, the most significant rights issue is the lack of basic needs such as food, education, health care, and clean water. They believe the government holds some responsibility for the failure to provide services. They cited corruption and the particularly high travel budget for top officials, which would be better spent on public services. In their opinion, citizens are losing patience with no sign of improvement since President Vieira took office.

¶4. (C) Organizationally, the HRU is a section of UNOGBIS. The Security Council has not yet renewed UNOGBIS, mandate in Guinea-Bissau for next year. The feeling among its staff and the Secretary General's Representative in Bissau, Joao Honwana, is that it will not be renewed due to Guinea-Bissau-fatigue at UN headquarters. This puts into question the continued existence of the HRU and its future mandate beyond 2006.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) Under each of the three strategies, the HRU appears to be active and effective. One area of possible improvement is that they do not dedicate resources toward solving what they identify as the biggest human rights problem -- existence of basic services. A proactive lobbying and educational outreach effort targeting policy makers might be an appropriate addition to their otherwise effective strategy.
JACOBS